

# **SPECIAL WORKSHOPS FOR THE BLIND**

**Ideas and experiences  
expressed by three experts  
in the field.**

Issued by

**WORLD COUNCIL FOR THE WELFARE OF THE BLIND**

**Committee on Rehabilitation, Training and Employment**

Printed by the Swedish Federation of the Visually  
Handicapped, Enskede, Sweden, 1979.



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## Introduction

One of the most important tasks in a rehabilitation programme for the blind is to provide work. In doing this all possibilities and solutions must be used. In many countries the special (or sheltered) workshops for the blind play an important role. The Committee on Rehabilitation, Training and Employment of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind has invited some of the most competent experts in this field to present their ideas, organizational models and experiences of special workshops in their respective countries.

This has resulted in a presentation of special workshops in three leading countries. Originally, we also wanted to include an example of "transitional" special workshops for the blind, the main objective of which was to prepare blind people for work in the open market. For various reasons it was not possible to include this presentation in the report. We want, however, to point to the fact that in some countries the transitional model also plays an important role in vocational rehabilitation and employment.

It is our hope that the following three presentations will stimulate and convey ideas especially to countries which are at an early stage in facing the problem of providing work for the blind. We believe that the special workshop, planned and organized with the main goal to provide work for the blind, can play a very important role both in providing work for the blind and in demonstrating the fact that blind people can participate in productive employment.

Bengt Lindqvist

Chairman  
WCWB Committee on Rehabilitation,  
Training and Employment





Training-Production Centres for the Blind  
in the Soviet Union

by

Usman A. Khafizov

Vice-President

All-Russia Association of the Blind

Usman Khafizov was born in 1925. In 1959 he graduated from the Moscow Engineering and Economy Institute and now specialises in economy and organisation of mechanical engineering. For 22 years he has worked for the All-Russia Association of the Blind and is now Vice-President and Chief Engineer of the Central Board of the All-Russian Association of the Blind. He is responsible for the workshops and enterprises of the Association as well as the Special Design Bureau.

At present, in the Soviet Union, there are 443 training-production centres which belong to Associations of the Blind functioning in each republic. All in all, 110 thousand visually handicapped workers are employed at these enterprises. In Russia alone, the total number of training-production centres is 194 and 58 thousand blind employees work at the centres.

The experience of many years has proved that placement of the visually handicapped at training-production centres of the Association is a most effective form of their employment. The principal task of the training-production centres is to create all necessary industrial and sanitary conditions for gainful employment as well as to construct cultural centres and housing for the workers.

In our understanding, gainful employment is placement of a blind person in accordance with recommendations made by Medical and Vocational Assessment Commissions; introduction of specially designed devices, equipment and gadgets to facilitate the work of the blind and to make the work as safe as possible. It also includes care of residual sight, touch and hearing, scientific organisation of production etc..

There has been a tendency to amalgamate and specialise training-production centres. Therefore, the total number of the enterprises within the All-Russia Association of the Blind is reducing, while the number of workers is increasing in each enterprise. This tendency results in investing material and financial resources for enlarging production, constructing industrial complexes and houses; involving highly qualified personnel in the organisation of production for the blind; introduction of more complex equipment for producing intricate articles etc..

Sighted people work at training-production centres of the Association as well. A legislation provides that a number of sighted employees at training-production centres should not exceed 50 per cent.

#### What do sighted people do at our training-production centres?

Firstly, they are engineers, technicians, designers, economists etc., who are directly involved in organising production for the blind. Secondly, they are sighted workers who are supposed to perform operations that are not feasible for the blind. Also, sighted workers are employed in some auxiliary departments, i.e. repairing, adjusting etc..

In fact, this system facilitates introduction of complex technological processes that result in producing various intricate articles.

To widen job opportunities for the blind, various industrial aids, equipment and gadgets are widely used. Sighted engineers at each training-production centre as well as the Special Design Office of the All-Russian Association of the Blind are responsible for developing or adjusting these aids (such as dies, presses, measuring or metal work instruments etc.). Involvement of sighted workers as well as introduction of various industrial aids resulted in employment of visually handicapped at major technological

operations. The total number of blind workers participating in the technological process makes 60-75 per cent. Visually handicapped workers can now operate lathe, milling, drilling and threading machines, different mechanical or pneumatic presses and plastic moulding machines. Assembling has become very popular among blind workers.

However, before the blind are allowed to operate the above mentioned machines, they are provided with vocational training courses which are based on specially developed programmes. Vocational training is provided immediately at a training-production centre.

### Vocational Training Courses

It is the chief engineer who is responsible for vocational training of blind workers. A newcomer is offered an occupation in accordance with his own wish, his actual capabilities, the state of his health and recommendations of a Medical and Vocational Assessment Commission. On-the-job training is provided by technicians and qualified workers. The term of training depends on the chosen occupation and it lasts from three to six months. This period is used for mobility and orientation training in the business area, familiarisation with different types of equipment, instruments and aids and also safety techniques. The trainees are supposed to get to know how the whole production is manufactured. They acquire all necessary skills and techniques for independent and efficient work. During the training, blind workers are paid scholarships and provided with overalls by the enterprise.

After the term of training the trainee takes exams and is qualified for an occupation. In addition to vocational training, enterprises of the Association provide refresher courses for the workers to enrich their theoretical background, to familiarise them with new equipment and techniques and to train workers for akin occupations. The term and procedure of optional training is



determined by administrators of the enterprise according to approved programmes.

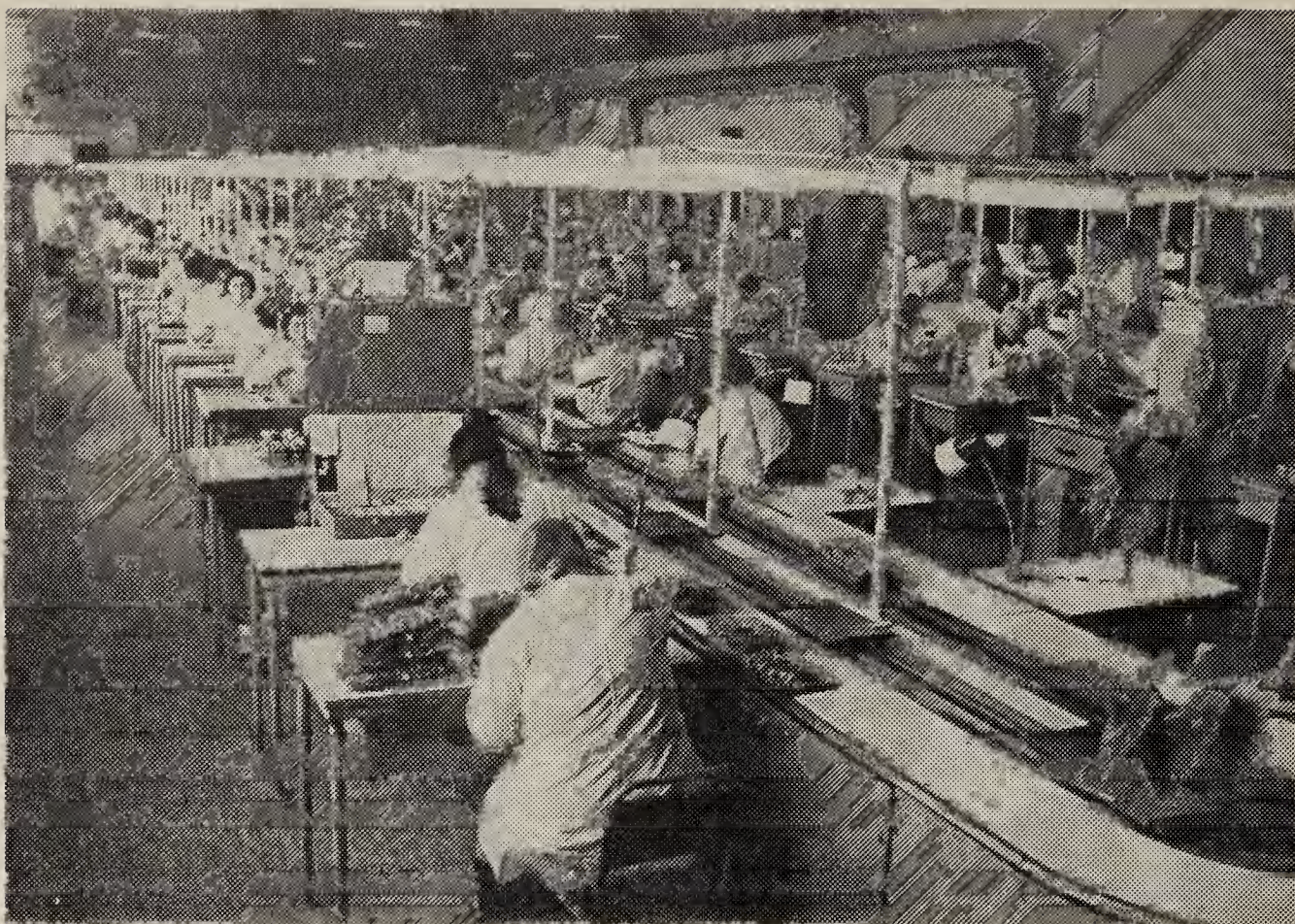


Fig. 1: A general view of a workshop where the blind assemble units for the Yunost-603 transistor TV-set:

Before vocational training is provided, the adult blind are entitled to a rehabilitation course at a rehabilitation centre. Visually impaired children are eligible for a rehabilitation course provided at special residential schools for blind and partially sighted children. Adequate organisation of production, division of complex operations into simpler ones, involvement of sighted workers for performing some operations inaccessible to blind workers and a great variety of industrial aids for the blind, have laid the basis for producing electric motors, reducing transformers,



low-voltage equipment, gadgets for illumination, electric adjusting apparatus, sets of wires, parts and units for automobiles, motorcycles, agricultural machines. Production of these items is included in the state economic plan. Raw material supplies and sale are provided by the state. Many training-production centres have concluded sub-contracts with state plans. The state factories send them orders for a great variety of units and parts for TV and radio sets, switchboard stations, and also intricate printed-circuit cards; several hundreds of various diodes, resistors, capacitors, transistors etc. must be installed in a determined place. Some enterprises produce technical and ordinary brushes, cardboard and textile articles.

### Blind Home-workers

Training-production centres are responsible not only for employment of the blind immediately in workshops but also for organisation of work at home for those who for some reasons are unable to travel to the enterprise. At present, ten-thousand blind home-workers are employed by the All-Russia Association of the Blind alone. In the whole of the Soviet Union the total number of blind workers is 21 thousand persons.

Various jobs are offered to home-bound workers, of which the most popular is knitting of shopping bags.

Those enterprises that produce electric appliances and low-voltage apparatus provide their home-workers with simple jobs for assembling these units.

Training-production centres are responsible for supplying home-workers with instruments and raw materials and bringing ready-made articles back to the enterprise.



## Organisation of Training-production Centres

Training-production centres are given great assistance in selection of most suitable items and organisation of production by the Central Design Office of the All-Russia Association of the Blind. Training-production centres can order drawings for special equipment and gadgets in the Office. The Central Design Office is also responsible for collection and dissemination of technical information relevant to organisation of production within the Association. It carries out research and experiments for development of technical aids for the visually impaired.

The present material and technical resources have been developed gradually. Training-production centres are exempt from some taxes. Before 1951 the state subsidised the Association of the Blind. Then, due to development and improvement of production, the enterprises have become more profitable. Since 1951 profits derived by the Association have made it possible to cover expenses for constructing industrial buildings, houses and cultural centres, purchasing equipment and vehicles, organising cultural and sport activities and treatment of Association members.

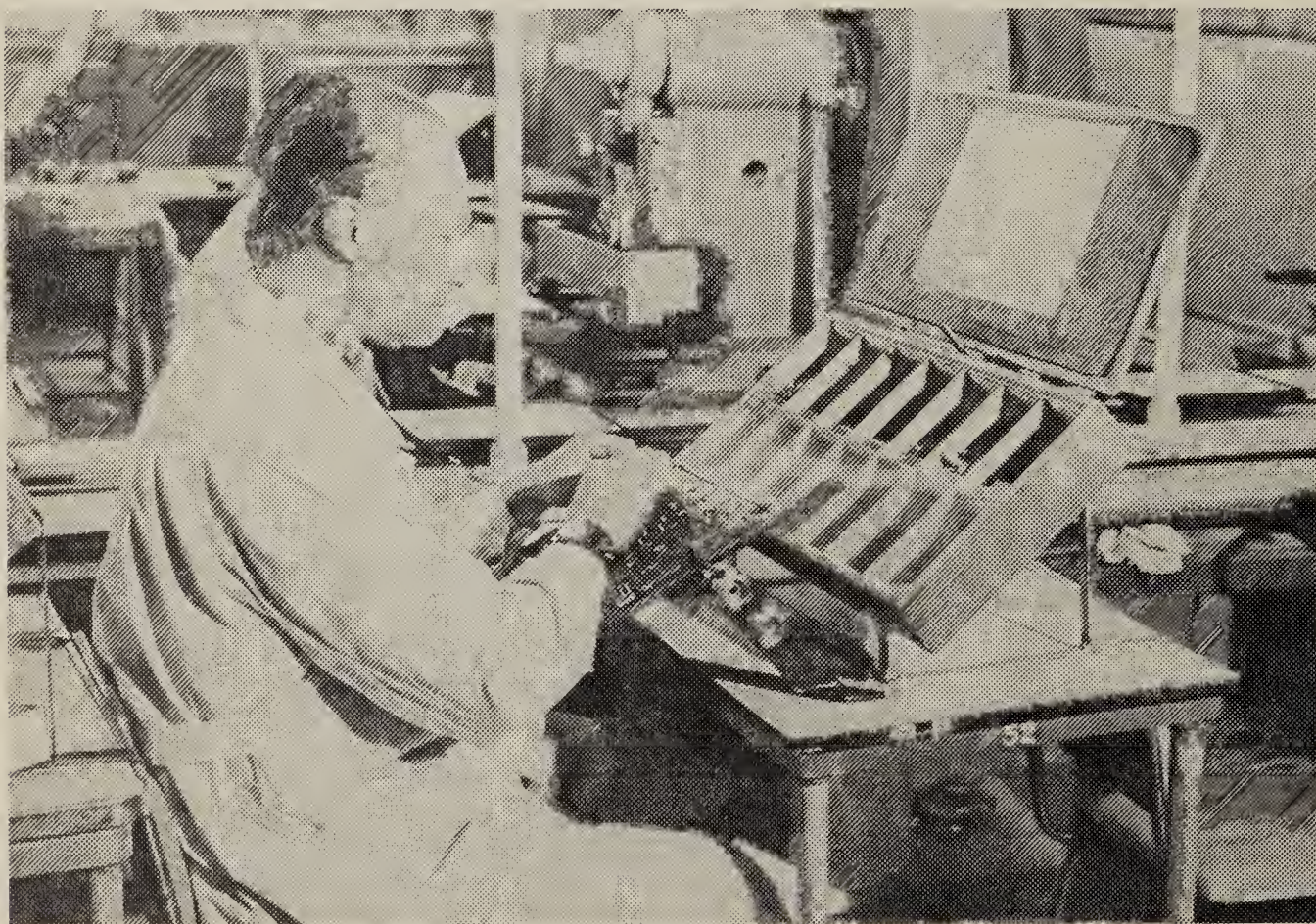


Fig. 2: A working place of a blind worker engaged in assembling units for the Yunost-603 transistor TV-set.



Wages of blind workers at training-production centres correspond to those of sighted workers who have the same qualification and occupation employed in open industry. The same is true of salaries of engineers and technicians employed by the Association.

Training-production centres are run by local boards of the Association. The local boards are responsible for employment and welfare of the blind within their region.

They work in close collaboration with local authorities in providing services to the visually impaired.

The Central Board of the Association of the Blind is responsible for all the activities of the Association. The Central Board develop social and economic plans of development, approve the budget of the Association, distribute material and financial resources and supervise activities of local boards and enterprises. The Central Board represents the Association on governmental institutions and participates in the development of legislation about the blind.



Fig. 3: A working place of a blind worker engaged in assembling light switches.



It follows from the above mentioned survey that training-production centres of Associations of the Blind are not sheltered workshops for the blind - they are special enterprises aimed at placement of the blind alongside sighted professionals, furnished with specially developed equipment, gadgets and technical aids providing productive and safe work for the visually impaired.

The Soviet Government places great emphasis on welfare of the blind. The problem of employment has been successfully solved. It means that every sightless person who is willing to work can be immediately employed. The blind can work successfully both at training-production centres and in state industry, and also in agriculture, science, gain arts. It is equal rights to education and employment that make the blind participating members of the community and facilitate their social integration.

## Blind Persons and the Special Workshop

by

Harold Richterman

Director

Rehabilitation Services Division

National Industries for the Blind

Harold Richterman, who was born in 1919, has a B.A. from Iowa State Teachers College and an M.A. from New York University. He was employed by the Industrial Home for the Blind between 1948 and 1969, first as a mobility instructor and later as supervisor of rehabilitation services and director of rehabilitation services. Since 1970 he has been Director of Rehabilitation Services at National Industries for the Blind. Mr Richterman is a member of the Board of Directors of the American Association of Workers for the Blind and serves upon the National Accreditation Council. He is also a member of the Advisory Board to Helen Keller Centre for Deaf/Blind Youths and Adults.

### Development of Specialised Employment Services in the United States

If we are going to concern ourselves with blind persons and their relationship to the special workshop or specialized employment services, it might be best for us to spend a few moments in outlining the development of such workshops and the reason for such development in the United States.

The special or sheltered workshop for the blind in the United States can be traced back to the year 1840 when a school for the blind started a workshop to provide jobs for some of its graduates. Because the prejudice towards blind persons prevented all but the most exceptional from becoming employed, this workshop was established to provide jobs for graduates of the school, most of whom could not find any means of employment. Thus the basic reason for the establishment of the first workshop in the U.S. revolves around the prejudice, misunderstanding, and superstition of the sighted population. This occurred in the year 1840 and as we, all of us, look at programs for the blind in our respective

countries we can wonder how much of this prejudice, misunderstanding, superstition and ignorance still persists when the sighted population of our countries are asked to deal and function equitably with persons who are blind.

The school workshop program mentioned above concerned itself with the making of "goods that could easily be made by the blind". However, this did not mean that such goods could be easily marketed and what resulted was huge stockpiles of generally unsaleable items which cluttered up all available space.

While this early workshop tried to cope with this situation and with the other ills inherent in operating a workshop for the adult blind as an adjunct to a residential school, it was unable to grow and flourish as intended but did provide the stimulus which gave rise to the development of workshops as independent undertakings.

Nearly all of the early workshops acted as "working homes" or "industrial homes for the blind", providing both residence and a work opportunity. Even with the gradual growth of workshops until the turn of the century, and then a much more rapid growth, the workshops continued to be plagued by emphasis on care, terminal employment, and only the bare minimum of training. With most of these workshops you soon had the same situation as you had in the first workshop established by the school for the blind in 1840. A high cost of operation and stockpiles of finished products for which there was no sales outlet. However even in the face of this, the workshops were able to continue their operations and on the whole gain public sanction and support.

It was from such beginnings that workshops began to take on added responsibilities and began to grow and diversify their operations until most of them, through their broadening service programs, developed into what we see now in the United States as agencies for the blind with a variety of services one of which is the workshop service. Even with this slow but continuous



growth, workshops continued to be plagued with the problem of economical marketing of the products they produced. Generally, they suffered from a lack of technique in merchandising and marketing, from a product line too narrow and without a demand, and from the low monetary value of the products being produced. For too long, those persons administering workshops selected articles of manufacture based on the need for the barest minimum of training or the lowest prices for raw materials with little regard to the law of supply and demand or the market place. One cannot help but believe that they felt that the article could be sold simply and purely because it was made by the blind. This sympathy selling probably was somewhat effective but could not and did not form a proper base for a successful marketing program.

For many years then, selling programs by workshops for the blind in the United States suffered from production of unsaleable products, poor quality products, door-to-door selling, sympathy selling and even from non-ethical marketing practices.

The cry from workshops all over the country was for the development of dependable marketing outlets for a variety of products that could be made by blind persons. This led to a concentrated effort by pioneers in the field in the United States to find such a market which in turn led in 1938 to the passage of the Wagner-O'Day Act which basically gave qualified workshops for the blind a priority second to Federal prisons to provide manufactured goods for the Federal Government.

I hope in this short history I have given you some idea of where we came from and where we were. There is nothing particularly outstanding in this description of the history of the movement except that there were those pioneers who refused to believe that blind persons must be relegated to poorly conceived, ill-ventilated, poorly lighted areas making baskets and brooms. This is the outstanding part of my description - that custom, superstition and ignorance were attacked and to a considerable degree overcome, as blind persons were provided for the first time unlimited and expanded work opportunities in special workshops for the blind.

## Definition of a Special Workshop for the Blind

While this paper will continue with the development of workshops for the blind under the Wagner-O'Day Act, let us for a moment or two take a look at some definitions of a special workshop for the blind. Originally, as noted previously, it was considered a "working home" or an "industrial home". From this beginning, as the home part of the workshop began to disappear workshops began to take on the picture of sheltered or special factories. Later on as "agency" services began to get involved with the clients of the workshop, we began to see supportive services become part of the workshop program until today "workshops are work oriented rehabilitation facilities with a controlled working environment and individual vocational goals which utilize work and related services for assisting the blind person to achieve his maximum vocational potential". A far cry from the first established workshop for the blind.

We at National Industries for the Blind see the workshop as having the obligation to provide some level of employment for every blind person who needs or wants the workshop, who completes a training program satisfactorily and who wants to work.

## The Wagner-O'Day Act

The Wagner-O'Day Act has acted as the stimulus for the growth and development of workshops for the blind in the United States. This Act and its regulations have encouraged those workshops wishing to manufacture goods for the Federal Government to meet certain criteria which in effect made for increased benefit for the blind persons being served.

Under the Act, all workshops for the blind in the program are continually monitored by National Industries for the Blind to make certain that the requirements of the Act are being met. The workshop must maintain a file on each workshop client which contains at a minimum an eye report indicating legal blindness, a summary

which indicates why the blind person was referred to this workshop service, a Certificate of Vision card which in addition to certifying to the legal blindness of the client indicates the presence of other handicaps in addition to blindness, and a performance rating report completed at least annually which indicates the need for continued workshop service or the readiness of the blind person for regular competitive employment.

The most important part of the Act revolves around the 75/25 percentage. A workshop cannot be eligible to associate with National Industries for the Blind or to do work for the Federal Government if it does not have at least 75% of its direct labor being performed by blind persons. There have been various suggestions over the years to consider a change in these percentages. These suggestions have been made by well meaning persons as they looked to do more sophisticated work for the Federal Government which would require more sighted people in direct labor. It was felt that the blind persons in the workshop did not have the sophisticated abilities necessary to perform certain types of work. However these suggestions for such a change have all but disappeared and their place has been taken by a tremendous thrust led by National Industries for the Blind to use the best engineering talent available to fixture, change, modify and automate operations so that blind persons of limited employability are able to function effectively in the manufacture of a wide variety of goods for the Federal Government.

#### The "National Industries for the Blind"

National Industries for the Blind was established as a non-profit agency shortly after the passing of the Wagner-O'Day Act in 1938 as the allocating agency for orders from the Federal Government to workshops for the blind. It was quickly obvious that it was not enough merely to allocate orders, because the workshops did not have the sophisticated managerial personnel to meet the rigid demands and specification of doing work for the Government. Thus our organization over the years has become a



helping organization of engineers, marketing personnel, finance personnel, rehabilitation personnel and a variety of other specialists whose main responsibility is the upgrading of every aspect of workshop operation so as to increase the numbers of blind persons being served, to increase their effectiveness at work, and to provide work to the shops consistent with their expertise and ability to produce a quality product, meet government specifications and deliver on time.

This job with the cooperation of the associated workshops is being accomplished! In 1976-1977, the workshops associated with National Industries for the Blind manufactured goods worth 50 million dollars for the Federal Government, in addition manufactured 45 million dollars worth of goods for other markets, and provided employment for about 5,000 blind people. An enviable record indeed and one that could be accomplished only through total workshop and National Industries for the Blind cooperation with only one goal in mind - the employment of every blind and multi-handicapped blind person who needs and can benefit from the services of the special workshop.

This then is the primary purpose of a workshop - there is no other primary purpose - employment for the limited blind person who without such employment would not have any employment.

#### The Function of a Special Workshop

As the workshop movement has strengthened in the United States and as difficulties persist in placing blind persons in competitive industrial occupations alongside their sighted counterparts, workshops for the blind in many instances are developing into first rate "industries for the blind" where they are competing in the open marketplace with regular sighted industries. However, they have not lost sight of their reason for being, and in such workshops one may usually see three industrial levels:

1. A regular industry level.
2. A sheltered workshop level.
3. A work activities level.

With three such levels, every blind person without regard to any disabilities he may have in addition to blindness which may handicap his productive capacity can still be provided with a satisfying level of employment and no blind person need be turned away because he cannot achieve some arbitrary subjective minimum established by well-intentioned but perhaps short-sighted management.

A workshop cannot be and should not be merely a place for blind persons to come to keep busy. We are doing a disservice to such blind persons if we do not allow them the dignity of work for pay but rather see such persons as objects of pity or even scorn and assume their inability to function effectively. Any workshop should be production oriented with production demands which provides meaningful jobs and which can compete with regular sighted industry. Each job must be selected and geared to meet the maximum performance of each blind person so that he, as well as all of us, sees his job as one of dignity and independence.

I suggest to you in this audience that a meaningful well-organized workshop to serve blind persons is a requirement in every community where there are blind persons who can benefit from such a service, if we are going to afford the blind person an opportunity for employment. We cannot assume that even with the best of intentions that regular competitive industry can or even wants to provide employment opportunities for every blind person who can and wants to work. Thus employment opportunities must be made available for those blind persons who cannot be absorbed by competitive industry. However this does not mean that the workshop for the blind should be any less efficient, any less satisfactory in terms of physical plant, any less capable in terms of tools and equipment, or any less skilled in managerial, productive and marketing abilities. It also does not mean that blind persons being provided an employment opportunity in such a workshop should or can be paid less than his



sighted counterpart for the same amount and quality of the work he produces. Benefits such as sick leave, vacation pay, holiday pay, which may be part of the work benefit program for sighted persons in regular employment, should be no less for blind persons in the special workshop.

Operating a sheltered workshop because of its primary goal - service to blind persons - in many ways provides much greater challenges to workshop management. Unlike regular industry, the first concern is the blind person and to operate successfully you must find the perfect combination of "protection and production". Protection of the blind person through service and using production to achieve this protection. One cannot overemphasize the importance of operating a workshop as a proper firm business operation in terms of financing, operation and selection of products. A workshop for the blind is an expensive operation as compared to regular competitive industry. A continuous stream of service to the blind person to maintain his effectiveness on the job results in expenses not usually incurred by regular industry. Such costs if charged to the workshop operation would make the selling price of the article produced by the blind person so expensive that it could not be sold in the open market place. It is wise to keep workshop accounts in such a way so as to reflect separately those costs which are normal industrial costs and can be charged to the products and service costs which cannot be charged to the product but which must be made up from contributions, fees, grants, and various other sources. Conversely, I submit also that such donated monies should not be used to maintain the manufacturing equilibrium of the workshop. If such donated monies must be used for such a purpose, then a close look should be taken at the business operation of the workshop to determine why losses are being incurred which require infusions of such monies.

#### Planning for a Sheltered Workshop in a Community

If you believe as I do that if we are going to provide employment opportunity for blind persons, there will be a need for a special

workshop for this purpose, how can we plan for the development of such a facility. It is obviously of major importance to enlist as much of the community as possible and I would suggest that consideration be given to enlisting the following in planning.

1. Medical and health agencies in the community.
2. Educational agencies.
3. State and local vocational agencies.
4. Public and private welfare agencies.
5. Civic clubs and organizations.
6. Business trade and labor organizations.
7. Governmental officials.
8. Influential and philanthropic citizens.
9. Representatives of the press, radio and television.

Not all of the above may be represented in a given community; however, those that do exist should be encouraged to contribute to the establishment of the workshop.

#### Determine the Need

Some knowledge should be available as to the number of blind people in the community, how many are presently employed in competitive employment and the handicaps in addition to blindness of those blind persons who are not employed. Other factors that enter into the determination of need include such things as available resources in the community and the type of industry in the community.

Even though the various groups involved may have completed their task, once agreement is reached on the need for the establishment of a workshop and the need for financial and moral support, they have a further responsibility of continuing support to the project. While the establishment of a workshop does not absolve the community of continuing support, by the same token the workshop must function on a high service and business level to maintain the respect of the sponsoring groups and individual citizens of the community.

A workshop serving the special needs of the blind in employment is both a social agency and a business. It differs from manufacturing establishments in that its primary reason for being is to provide a service to people through the manufacture of a saleable product. Because it is not operated for profit, it still is not excused from good business practices. In fact it is even more important that it be operated efficiently since poor organization and administration will further handicap the people being served.

In organizing a workshop, consideration must be given to:

1. Legal incorporation.
2. The development of an unpaid Board of Directors representing a broad cross section of the community.
3. Development of a public relations program.
4. Fund raising. (3 types)

(a) Capital Funds

Monies collected for the express purpose of providing the permanent assets of the agency such as machinery, tools, permanent office equipment, building, trucks, etc.

(b) Revolving Funds

This fund is necessary so that raw materials can be purchased and also for the payment of wages to the employed blind clients.

(c) Operating Funds

Such funds are used for salaries for personnel, repairs, heat, light, maintenance and such items which occur frequently. While in time there



should be a decrease in the amount of operating funds necessary, the first few years of operation will be the most expensive in the use of community or donated funds.

5. Physical Plant.
6. Legal Regulations.
7. Location of the workshop and accessibility for the blind persons being served.

Even after we have been able to accomplish all of the above and now have established a workshop, we are now faced with product planning.

Product planning represents the workshop's first step towards participation in and competition with regular industry. If the workshop intends to assume reasonably steady employment and wages to blind persons, then it must determine insofar as possible its assets and liabilities in terms of manpower, tools, plant and materials. Generally, this is the approach taken by regular industry. Industry selects a product and hires workers to produce it. Such workers may be hired or fired on the basis of profit or loss. The workshop reverses this procedure. It must find suitable products to be manufactured or processed by a blind person who cannot or should not be fired because he is our primary responsibility and at the same time, the workshop must attempt to secure stable sales outlets insuring regular wages at a suitable level.

There are several vital considerations in the choice of products:

- (a) The type of worker - is he totally blind, partially sighted, only blind, blind with a handicap in addition to blindness.

- (b) Space availability.
- (c) Equipment availability.
- (d) Market needs for consumption of item.

In general, workshops for the blind are engaged in prime manufacturing or in subcontract work. Both have advantages and disadvantages.

In prime manufacturing:

Advantages may be:

1. Permits easier control of workload.
2. Provides better opportunity to train to industrial standards.
3. Unit operation gives an objective basis for evaluating costs.
4. May provide greater training opportunities with power equipment and tools.
5. Usually offers higher wages possibilities.

Disadvantages may be:

1. Danger that pressures of production may override the emphasis on training or upgrading of the blind person.
2. Involves the acute risks and cost of product development, purchased raw materials, pricing, sales, inventories.
3. With volume business, a modern quality control system will be indicated.
4. Requires an extensive and continuous sales program.



In subcontract work:

Advantages may be:

1. Provides an opportunity to train to industrial standards.
2. Unit operation gives an objective basis for evaluating costs.
3. Average required space for worker may be less.
4. Materials may be furnished by customer.
5. Provides a wide variety of work experience through varied contracts.

Disadvantages may be:

1. Depends on availability of suitable contracts.
2. Work may be limited in variety.
3. Work may be seasonal and sporadic.
4. Danger that production pressures may override the importance of training.
5. Peak loads and tight production schedules require skilled management and operational procedures.

Who should arrange and maintain special workshops?

There has always been and probably always will be a good deal of discussion, agreement, and disagreement on who is best equipped and who has the responsibility of organizing and maintaining a special workshop for blind persons. Is it the local community or private sector organized and managed by a volunteer group? Should it be local government that should assume the responsibility of the Federal or National Government to go into the manufacturing or subcontracting business in competition with private industry?

I submit that the most feasible and easiest operation is one that is operated by a local volunteer group with financial support from the community, from local government and from the national government. Those workshops operated by government find themselves caught in the red tape that plagues every bureaucracy. Government was never set up in such a manner so it could function as a day-to-day business where decisions concerning the growth and welfare of the business have to be made on a moment's notice. There is no room or time in a well run business for sending memos in triplicate, for waiting for meetings or for waiting for rules and regulations to be handed down from someone high in government who knows little if anything about the day-to-day workshop operation. Decisions to buy raw materials when good buys are available or when the market is right have to be made without bids in triplicate or all those government regulations which delay decisions until it is too late for the decision to have any effect. Let governments govern, but let the private sector oriented to running a business facility do what it knows best without bureaucratic interference which can only delay, deter and bind the day-to-day program which is the basis of the special workshop. I have no question about the implementation of standards by governmental agencies for the use of governmental monies, but if a workshop can meet the standards set by government for the granting of funds, it should be allowed to run its workshop business like a business.

One might ask whether such a system can really function effectively. The answer lies in looking at the program under the Wagner-O'Day Act and National Industries for the Blind. The Wagner-O'Day Act is a Federal law and is administered through a Committee appointed by the President of the United States. Through this Committee, a non-profit private organization, National Industries for the Blind was established. The Committee has set the regulations, National Industries for the Blind follows the regulations. The workshops associated with National Industries for the Blind function within these regulations and each workshop program is an independent entity without governmental control. The workshops are monitored by National Industries for

the Blind as far as meeting the regulations are concerned and as far as meeting government specifications on the manufacture of goods for the Federal Government are concerned. When the workshops receive grants from governments for special programs, the workshop is accountable to the government to use this money as they indicated they would and to this extent only are they "monitored" if you will by government authorities.

While there are a number of workshops associated with National Industries for the Blind that are operated by State government, in many cases these workshops are marked by difficulties in their day-to-day operations because of the bureaucratic necessities built into laws that were never intended to apply to day-to-day business operations.

#### Employment of Severely Limited Blind People

While I believe that all blind persons in need of employment should be served in a special workshop for the blind if they cannot be placed competitively, I can see that if a minimum hourly rate is established for such employment, that there will be those severely limited blind persons who will not be offered such employment because even with their best efforts, they will not be able to approach the required minimum wage. Therefore, I submit that whenever possible operations in the workshop should be piece rated so management will be less reluctant to deny an opportunity to a severely limited blind person on the basis of low productivity. While I concede that such low productive workers will increase overhead per capita costs, I further maintain that those costs over and above normal industrial costs should be born by the community and the government, and should not be costs that must be assumed by the workshop operation. Inherent in all of this is the expertise of the workshop and its personnel to select and fixture operations in such ways so as even to allow the least capable an opportunity for productive endeavor. Denying a blind person the opportunity for employment in the special workshop when he does not have the capability for



competitive employment means relegating him to a life of idleness and frustration and we have no right to make such a decision when we have established a workshop to serve limited blind persons not capable of competitive employment.

### Type of Work

Very often we at National Industries for the Blind are asked about what types of work blind people can do. I am always somewhat confused by this type of question as my difficulty revolves around trying to determine what type of work blind people cannot do. After I get away from driving a truck or a car, the jobs that blind persons cannot do is narrow indeed. Remember first that we are talking about people who are blind. People who have the same range and degree of abilities that sighted people have. Blind persons capabilities in the special workshop to do a variety of jobs is not so much a problem of their blindness, but a problem of the expertise and ingenuity and knowledge of the staff of the shop. Their initiative, ability, imagination, engineering talent, foresightedness and courage will all determine the type of work that blind persons will be able to perform effectively in the special workshop.

In N.I.B. associated workshops, blind persons are making washclothes as well as mattresses. Sewing mops as well as signal flags for the military. Packing plastic knives, forks and spoons as well as manufacturing them in huge injection molding machines. Producing duffle bags for military personnel as well as making bottle brushes for babies bottles. What kind of work can blind people do? Better ask what kind of people you have to provide not only the work to blind people, but also who are stimulated enough to "dare to try". You can stay in brooms and baskets forever and probably no one will fault you because everyone believes that this is what blind people are supposed to do! It takes courage, talent, and of course money to try to reach sophisticated levels of employment for blind persons which will provide such persons with a good deal more of the pittance you can count on from basket making.



N.I.B. shops today are competing with regular industry making the same items at the same quality and at competitive prices. This is because National Industries for the Blind believes, the workshops believe, and the blind persons being served believe - all of this represents an unbeatable combination.

From time to time, someone raises the question about monopolies in products for the blind. As for instance all brooms to be made by the blind. I have little patience with this idea or any idea which suggests that blind persons should be confined, limited or stifled and not be allowed the same broad opportunities as anyone else. By what right does anyone set himself up as judge of what blind people should and should not do? And suppose there are those blind who cannot make the broom or do not wish to do so? What of such blind persons? No my friends - the world is our oyster as far as work opportunities are concerned for blind persons - we must have the courage to reach out and open it in the name of blind persons.

If there is anything that will hinder more than anything else the employment progress of blind persons, it will be the attitudes of sighted persons in our communities and in our governments. If such negative attitudes about the capabilities of blind persons also rest with us or our staffs in the special workshops, then we have problems indeed and will be making baskets without markets to sell them in, until the end of time.

### Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Up to this point, little if anything has been said about vocational rehabilitation. Much has been discussed about the workshop and service to the blind person, but I do not believe I have used the words vocational evaluation, work adjustment, on-the-job training, or any of those terms which add up to vocational rehabilitation services. I have purposefully left this phase of our discussion until last because of the particular emphasis I wish to place upon it. Unlike most workshops serving the handicapped in our country, vocational rehabilitation services, except for on-the-job training,

are not part of the specific production program of the workshop. These services are provided to the blind person separate and apart from the workshop in order that such services be provided in an atmosphere where production demands cannot interfere with services to the blind person. Therefore, there is little confusion in workshops for the blind as to their function. They do not attempt to combine a variety of roles and thus dilute efforts in effectively pursuing one or more of the roles. Workshops for the blind are recognized as having the greatest success in providing extended employment for limited blind persons because their goal in the workshop is clearly established and vocational evaluation and prevocational training are provided prior to a blind person's entrance into the workshop. Thus a blind person is offered a job opportunity in the workshop after it has been determined that at that given point in time the workshop represents the highest level of vocational potential for that person.

Vocational evaluation and work adjustment services prior to employment at any level, designed to determine the strengths and weaknesses of a person's work abilities and then to treat such problems as may be identified is best provided in an atmosphere where carefully selected and fully trained instructors can provide such services without the pressures of manufacturing or production requirements. Having such a program in close conjunction with the workshop makes it possible to render needed services and at the same time avoid the danger of losing sight of the practical down to earth considerations of a manufacturing workshop for the blind. Such a program frees the rendering of needed services from the day to day contingencies that arise in the operation of manufacturing facilities that so often make it impractical to give the demands of vocational diagnostic and training services the attention they require. It provides increased capacity for offering these services on an individualized basis and it affords excellent opportunities for the study and development, under fully controlled conditions, of work methods, training techniques, and vocational diagnostic methods and instruments.

The vocational experience, education history, social background, and physical condition of each blind person determines his need for vocational diagnostic services, defines the specific content and emphasis of such services and contributes significantly to the findings derived through such services.

At the end of the vocational evaluation or examination of the blind person, he can enter a period of training to eliminate the weaknesses found in the evaluation, to develop strengths, and to generally begin to bring him to his highest potential level of employment.

Actual vocational training for a specific job, if the blind person is going to the workshop, can be done within the workshop facility. However, he can be assigned to such a facility with a report which will indicate to workshop personnel what the blind person is able to do, what he cannot do, and how well he is able to do. There will be little or no need to experiment in the workshop, wasting machine time or wasting raw materials as he can be assigned to a specific job for which he can be trained because it has already been determined that he has the skills necessary to perform on this specific job.

In the development of any workshop program or in the improvement of already established workshop program, careful attention must be given to the separateness of diagnostic services as opposed to vocational training and employment if we are primarily interested in a job for each individual with the highest success potential. In addition and not to be overlooked is the huge saving in time, money, and equipment that can accrue to the workshop when they are free of those assignments which are not normal industrial assignments. This too allows productive manufacturing and marketing people to run the business they were employed to run and allows rehabilitation personnel to do the specific job for which they were originally employed.



## The Future of Special Workshops for the Blind

The future of workshops for blind people rests with us. It can easily become the key resource in providing work opportunities. The trained blind worker can take his place on the same level as sighted workers if we in service to blind persons will not be blinded ourselves as to what can be done, what should be done, and what will be done.

We in the workshop movement must recognize the dignity of each blind person without regard to his additional handicaps or limitations. We must look at his potential and nothing else. If the blind person is going to realize his vocational potential, he will do it because of our help and if our help is withheld because of arbitrary artificial standards which we have established because of our own limitations, then the problem of underemployed and unemployed blind persons will always be with us. On the other hand technology is available today to better serve all blind persons in vocational rehabilitation if we will just reach out and grab it.

There are many positive minded thoughtful people who feel that we may be over-stressing the concept of work for this population. Every person they say does not need nor does he seek the satisfaction of a paycheck. They see rather pleasant day centers or occupational and recreational centers. I say let them not speak for the numbers and numbers of people who are blind who see their role in society as we see ours - as working contributing members who want what we all want - an opportunity to make our contribution to ourselves, our community and our country - we ask for this - they ask for little more.

## I: Sheltered Employment in the United Kingdom

by

Tom Parker

General Secretary and Treasurer

National League of the Blind and Disabled

Tom Parker was born in 1909. As the result of an accident at 12 years of age, he became totally blind at the age of sixteen. In 1922 he was elected to the National Executive Council of the National League of the Blind and three years later became a paid organiser of the League. Since 1969 he has served as General Secretary of the League, which is a Trade Union of blind and disabled workers which also has interests in other aspects of blind welfare. He has been active in the political life of the Labour Movement and was an elected Councillor for 23 years from 1946-1969. He represents the League at the Royal National Institute of the Blind, and has been a member of the Executive Committee of the International Federation of the Blind since 1969 and a First Vice-President since 1974. He is also Vice-Chairman of the Coordinating Committee of National Organisations of the Blind in the European Economic Community.

### Historical Background

1. There have been sheltered workshops for the blind in Great Britain for almost 200 years. They were first set up by Local Voluntary Societies for the Blind to provide employment facilities for blind people. The earliest of the workshops was set up in seaport towns and the work provided largely consisted of picking oakum for the ship-building trade and also for the manufacture of ships' fendoffs. The picking of oakum was terminated in workshops for the blind when steel ships superseded the old wooden sailing ships. Ships fendoffs are still being manufactured in workshops for the blind.
2. One of the purposes for setting up these workshops was to permit blind people to earn a livelihood as an alternative to having to rely on begging in the streets.

3. Very early in the history of the workshops, the two occupations mentioned above proved to be insufficient to meet the needs of all the blind people wishing to work. It was also found that blind people living in inland towns also wished to have the opportunity to take up employment. A number of new occupations were therefore developed in the workshops for the blind.

4. In the early workshops the old so-called traditional trades such as basket making, brush making and mat making were introduced. The occupations were largely followed by men, and it was sometime later when opportunities were provided for blind women who were employed in hand knitting.

5. It is reasonable to presume that there were two main reasons for blind people being employed on the old crafts. Firstly, they required very little in the way of equipment, and, secondly, most activities for workers were, in fact, based on craft work requiring merely hand tools. These workshops were, in fact, set up before the days of the industrial expansion for able-bodied workers generally.

#### Type of Equipment Needed

6. For example, all the equipment required by a basket maker would be a couple of knives, a pair of shears, a number of bodkins of varying size and two blocks of wood held together by two adjustable screws which made it possible for workers to hold sticks firmly in place when making square baskets. It is interesting to note that these tools have not changed for hundreds of years. It also costs very little to fully equip a basket maker so that he could follow his occupation.

7. In respect of brush making, again one can see that there was very little required in the way of equipment. Merely a pan to hold pitch, a source of heat under the pan to melt the pitch and keep it hot whilst the worker was actually at work, and a supply of raw materials.



8. In respect of mat makers all they required in the early days was a wooden frame. This was subsequently replaced by a loom which undoubtedly increased the daily production of each mat maker. In recent years, compressed air systems have been added to the looms thus removing much of the physical strain previously imposed on the worker with the resultant increase in productivity.

9. The old hand knitting carried out by the blind women workers in these workshops was gradually replaced by the introduction of knitting machines. These machines were of various kind. There were the round knitting machines for making socks and flat knitting machines for making many other kinds of knitted garments. The number of women workers employed on these machines has been considerably reduced in recent years. Today we find many of these women now operating power driven machines. We also have instances of men actually employed in this particular occupation.

10. These early workshops clearly showed that blind workers had considerable skill in their hands. They were given the opportunity to demonstrate that there was a latent skill which could be developed and exploited if there was adequate training available.

11. In recent years, particularly since the war, there has been a complete change of occupations in the sheltered workshops. The old crafts are rapidly disappearing. There are practically no sighted basket makers left in Great Britain and the number of blind basket makers is also being reduced each year.

12. The number of blind brush makers using the old pitch pan technique is also being reduced. Blind workers are now using machines for producing brushes. An example of this latter change reveals that in one workshop three blind brush makers using such equipment are now producing as many brushes in a day as were previously produced by 18 workers under the old system.

13. The same can be said about the blind women who are still employed in knitting departments. The use of power operated machines has led to a reduction in the number of blind women in this occupation because their productivity has increased.

14. In the years since the war, there has been a complete revolution in the types of work being carried out in the modern workshops for the blind. Changes have been imposed through changing demand on the part of the customers. There has been a great need to change the pattern of activity so that the workshops can meet these ever-changing needs.

15. We now find blind workers making a whole variety of articles which were previously believed to be beyond their skills. Experience has shown that with the necessary training and the availability of the right kind of equipment and machinery, there are really few jobs which can not be undertaken by blind workers. At the end of this paper I will give a list of some of the modern jobs being done by blind workers in the workshops for the blind. Suffice it to say at this point in this paper that the changes have been dramatic.

16. For many years, blind people found lucrative employment making mattresses in the blind workshops. Nowadays they have expanded this work and in addition to making mattresses they are making divans and all kinds of upholstery work. In the old days, blind workers engaged in bedding, or carpentry, used the old-fashioned hammer and nail and other hand tools. Today they are using staple guns and nail guns and power operated tools generally. One can easily see that with the use of such tools the production of each worker has been considerably increased. They are also able to use power driven saws because suitable guards have been devised to reduce the danger of accidents. Blind women workers are also employed in the bedding department sewing mattress covers by using electrically operated sewing machines. We now find therefore that, with the right precautions, many blind workers are using these sophisticated machines. The ability to use such tools and machines has made it possible to even increase the range of work being carried out.

17. Blind workers are now being employed in many aspects of the trade requiring articles made from wood. They are producing kitchen equipment such as sink units and kitchen cupboards. School and office furniture also spring to mind as one of the recent developments. The production of tubular steel chairs and tables are also a recent development in the manufacturing field.

18. Packaging is now being done in workshops for the blind using skin packaging machines, vacuum forming packaging machines and a host of other packaging techniques to meet the modern demand. It has been accepted that to sell goods today they have to be packaged attractively and many manufacturers in open industry are using the skills and modern equipment in the workshops simply for packaging purposes. Blind workers have shown that they can meet this need.

## II: Development of New Workshops for the Blind

19. If I were given the task of creating a workshop organisation for employing blind people in countries where they have not existed in any great number in the past, I would take the following steps:

- (a) I would first of all set up a small planning team. At the head of this team I would have a Chairman or Co-ordinator. Such an officer would need to be able to co-ordinate the activities of those serving with him and also be able to inspire them to be enthusiastic in their approach to the problem.
- (b) I would then select a Technical Officer who would lead a small section. After the Chairman or Co-ordinator had made the necessary approach to Government and obtained the goodwill of the leaders of the Government, it would be the duty of the technical team to study the list of articles regularly purchased by Government Departments at all levels. This means both centrally, regionally



and locally. They should look at articles regularly required by these department and study whether any of them can be made by blind people if they are suitably trained and workshops are suitably equipped to produce those articles. It may well be found that the blind workers could make a considerable proportion of such articles. There may, however, be certain parts which would be beyond the capacity of the blind worker. In this event, consideration should be given to the needs to introduce sighted workers to carry out that part of the work which would be beyond the reach of the blind workers. It may well be that some seeing disabled people could undertake this part of the operation. It has been shown in some countries that by using the skills of the blind workers and the skills of the seeing disabled workers in a complementary manner the entire article could be produced in the workshop. Once this has been established, the Co-ordinator should enter into discussions with the appropriate Government leaders to try to secure the introduction of a system in which the Government will decide that in future as much of this work as is required to keep workshops fully occupied shall be guaranteed to them. Such a guarantee will make it possible for the Workshop Management to plan its production on a long term basis.

- (c) The technical team should also study the articles regularly imported into the country. They should try to determine whether they can be made in the workshops. If they can, the necessary discussions should be instituted so that the workshops are assured that a fair proportion of this work is also made available for the workshop.

- (d) If these steps are taken, it could lead to a system in which blind people at present not employed could become producers and self-supporting.
- (e) The technical team should study the future plans of their Government. For example, will they be entering into the tourist trade and thus developing tourism? If so, this will mean that new hotels will be built to cater for these visitors. New hotels will need to be furnished. There will be the need for bedroom furniture of all kinds. There will be need for lounge chairs, dining room chairs and tables. There is evidence that such hotels have been furnished by blind workshops in Europe.
- (f) They should also study the plans for any expansion in modern housing. Again it has been shown quite clearly that blind workshops can play their part in furnishing these new housing units. We have experience where a workshop for the blind is actively involved in producing and supplying kitchen furniture including sink units, kitchen cupboards, wall cupboards and built-in wardrobes for major housing authorities. This is giving considerable satisfaction to blind workers who realise they are participating in the efforts to meet a social need.
- (g) The technical team should set up a Production Prototype Unit whose purpose shall be to analyse the work required to be done and to determine the most effective way of producing the article. They should also involve themselves in designing new ranges of articles likely to find a consumer market. The experience gained in such a production unit would be of help in determining which kind of tools are needed, which kind of machine can be used to improve production, which kind of jigs are most likely to be of assistance to blind workers, and thus increase their productivity.

- (h) Experience gained in such a production unit would be a useful guide in setting up workshops for the employment of blind people. Such a technical team should be involved in providing guidance as to the type of building required, and the lay-out of the building, always bearing in mind that it should be designed to meet the needs of blind people. Usually, they will require more space per worker than is generally required for able-bodied workers.
- (i) When planning a new workshop, every effort should be made to ensure that the production area is on one floor, preferably the ground floor.

#### Training of Instructors and Supervisory Staffs

- (j) The technical team should become responsible for the training of instructors who will teach the blind trainee. Training must be efficient if the end product is to be an efficient worker. The person selected for such training should have knowledge of the technical requirements of the job in hand. This, however, is not sufficient when dealing with blind people. Such instructors, therefore, should be shown that different training methods are required in such establishments. It may be necessary in the early days for some selected personnel to be sent to countries where workshops have existed for a long time, so that they can be taught the teaching techniques required when dealing with blind trainees.
- (k) After a few years it will be found possible to promote competent blind workers so that they can become instructors, departmental foremen or managers, and even works managers. The prospect of such promotion possibilities will be of tremendous encouragement to blind workers, and will undoubtedly prove to be a spur to achieving greater proficiency.



## Marketing

- (l) A Marketing Section should be set up as early as possible, when plans are being determined. The purpose of this Section should be to study market opportunities. They should try to find out what consumable goods are permanently in short supply. When this information is available, they should refer their findings to the Technical Section, which will then consider whether it is technical feasible for the work to be undertaken by blind workers. If they find that this is possible, it will provide new lines of work which could lead to the employment of an increasing number of blind workers. Such an investigation may well reveal that articles are required which will not demand much skill from workers to produce. This would make it possible for the lesser skilled to be employed.
- (m) The Marketing Section should also be responsible for identifying sources of supply of the raw materials, thus ensuring a steady supply. This can be a very important aspect of the entire plan. It could be extremely frustrating if the Technical Section discovered suitable work, only to find that there are problems in obtaining the necessary raw materials.
- (n) At an early stage in such developments, every effort should be made to involve the blind workers in the administration of the workshops. This would give them the sense of belonging. It would undoubtedly make them feel that they were an essential and integral part of the whole enterprise. They would cease to regard the workshop as merely being a place where they went to work and would regard it with a new interest. They would become increasingly interested in the success of the enterprise. This would produce better workers. The importance of employment to blind people can not be

over-emphasised. It will bring a new dimension into their lives. Job satisfaction and the consequent sense of achievement will create a feeling of pride in the individual worker and his family. They will recognise the fact that they have now become producers as well as consumers. They will be earning a livelihood, and at the same time they will be contributing to the National economy. They will have achieved parity with other citizens. This is important and will do a great deal to raise the morale of the blind worker and will be of encouragement to blind people everywhere.

Earlier in this paper, I indicated that at the end I would give a list of some of the jobs being carried out by blind workers in sheltered employment. This should not be regarded as a complete list of all the work being undertaken. Jobs are changing from time to time to meet changing requirements. The important thing to remember at all times is that once the blind person has become a worker and has acquired confidence in his abilities, it will become comparatively easy for him or her to change from one job to another. This facility to change the nature of the work being done will be of importance because it would also introduce variety into the lives of blind workers.

#### A Selected List of Jobs being carried out in Workshops for the Blind

- A. Assembly work of all kinds and the production of AIDS for the disabled.
- B. Basket making of all types.  
Brush making including the old traditional and machine-produced brushes.  
Bedding - mattresses of all kinds, shapes and sizes.
- C. Carpentry - This includes the production of furniture and pallets used for loading in modern containers.  
Chair-caning and repairing.

- D. Divans - including the making of the wooden frame, the covering and any upholstery that may be required.  
Detergents - Making and bottling.
- E. Engineering - including light assembly work, operating capstans, lathes, drills, presses, both hand and power. Making of components on a sub-contract basis for other industrial companies.  
Making of electrical components, switches etc. Small electric motors.  
Wiring of harnesses for television receivers.
- F. Furniture. This covers a wide range of activities.  
Currently workshops are producing school furniture such as desks, chairs and cupboards.  
Office furniture, including typing desks and cupboards.
- G. Gardening furniture - usually made of metal, consisting of chairs and tables with sunshades attached.
- H. High frequency P.V.C. welding. Producing wallets for holding documents, licence holders and postal packets for cassettes, both talking book and compact variety.
- I. Injection moulding, using plastics for the production of small transistor radio cases, decks for record players etc.
- J. Joinery . This involves woodwork of various kinds.
- K. Knitting - using Flat and Round knitting machines, also power operated knitting machines. Work mostly done by blind women, but there are some instances of men doing this work.
- M. Matmaking - Production of all kinds of mats, including lettered mats.
- N. Netting for various purposes.



- O. Ottomans.
- P. Packaging - This covers simple fork for less skilled blind workers, such as counting items for inserting into packets. There is also more sophisticated packaging of the bubble, shrink and vacuum forming type.
- S. Sewing - This is usually done by blind women workers using power-operated sewing machines connected with the bedding industry.
- T. Toiletries - This includes the manufacture of soap, shampoo, bath salts, bubble bath, har cream and perfume.  
Toys - Both soft and wooden.
- W. Wirework - This includes the manufacturing of fireguards, safety guards for industrial machines, litter baskets, hanging flower baskets etc.

The foregoing list is a summary, and each section could be broken down into a whole variety of component elements.



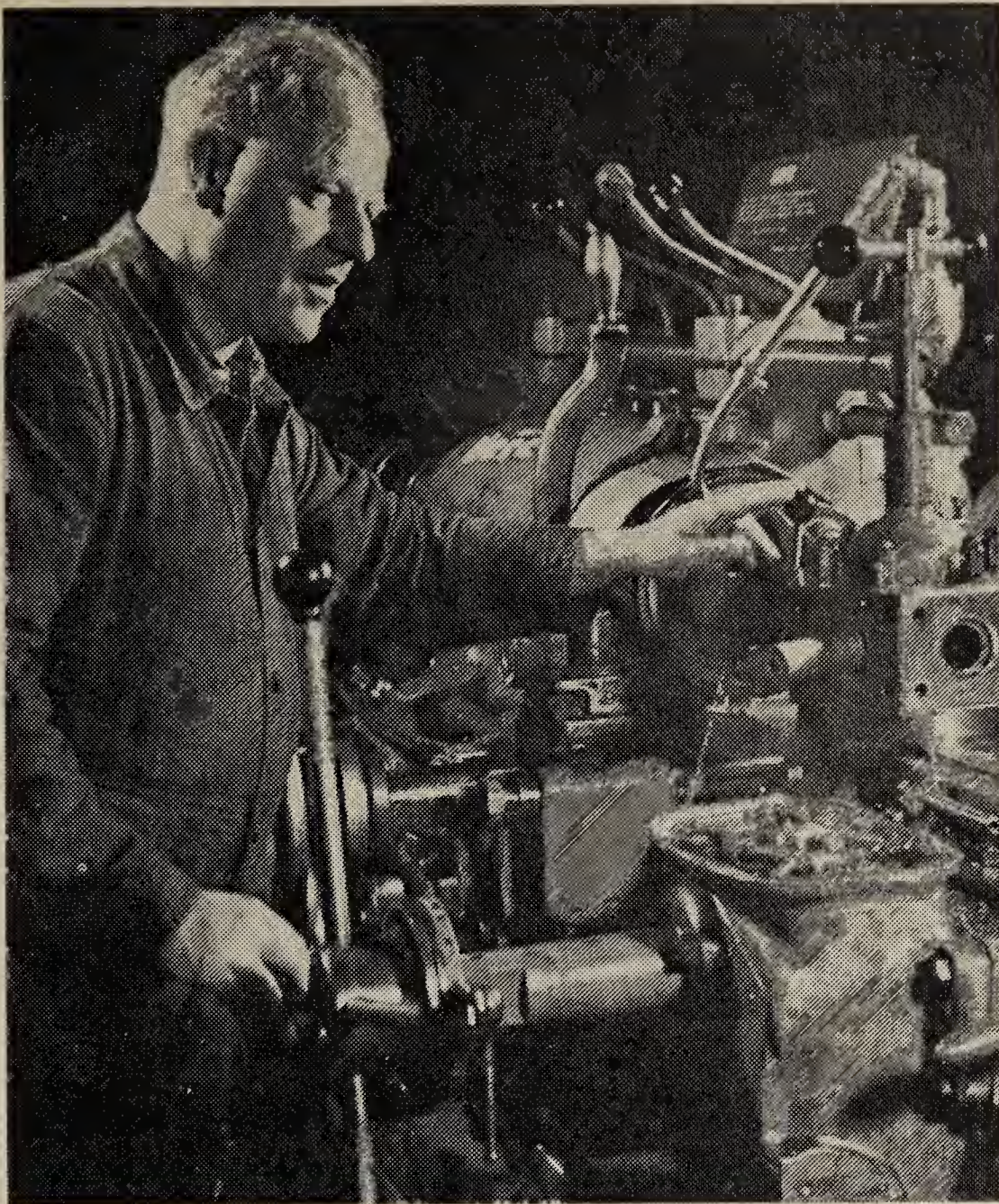


Fig. 1: A blind man operating a capstan lathe in an engineering department.



Fig. 2: Goods made at the Hull and East Riding Workshops for the Blind.







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